

(Ste. Genevieve Herald ) A public forum on the 2007 Farm Bill scheduled in Ste. Genevieve on October 4 should be of interest to the entire community, according to Joe Fallert Jr., president of United Steelworkers Local 169, since farmers and other workers share many of the same interests and concerns.

“Farming is a key part of our local, state and national economies,” Fallert said. “What happens to farmers isn’t so different from what happens to other workers, and how they fare should be important to all of us.”

Fallert, a lifetime resident of Ste. Genevieve County, is running as the Democratic candidate for the 104th District seat in the Missouri House.

The forum on farm policy involves a visit to the community by Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minnesota), the ranking minority member of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Agricultural Committee. Peterson will conduct the forum, and a number of state and local officials are expected to be present, including Fred Ferrell, director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

The local forum was arranged, in large part, due to the efforts of U.S. Third District Congressman Russ Carnahan (D-St. Louis), and in commenting on the event, Fallert said he wanted to thank Carnahan for making the forum possible.

“I was appreciative and very pleased when I learned last week that the forum will be held here and that local farmers will have input into helping set federal farm policy,” Fallert said. “It is a great opportunity. The people who are involved in the U.S. agriculture industry—and most importantly, those operating family farms—should have a say in their own future.”

Fallert added that he also hopes those involved in other sectors of the economy will attend the session, at least to lend support.

“Many of the same problems the agriculture industry is facing have been affecting the manufacturing sector for years,” Fallert said, citing what he called “failed trade policies” such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), that he says have led to “the continued erosion of manufacturing jobs,” and what he sees as potential threats posed by U.S. participation in the World Trade Organization.

According to Fallert, such agreements “have promised great things for the nations involved, but in the end they have only caused a race to the bottom in the areas of labor, workers rights, environmental and human rights standards.”

He says members of his own organization have felt the impact. "As steelworkers we have suffered and been impacted by world trade policy," he said.

Some farm groups agree that there are dangers associated with NAFTA, CAFTA and the potential impact of policies coming out of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The National Farmers Union was a vocal opponent of CAFTA; the National Family Farm Coalition has aggressively opposed aspects of the WTO; the American Agriculture Movement has called NAFTA a "war on farmers and ranchers."

Fallert said the Steelworkers Local "hopes to attend this session as an organization already impacted by the WTO and NAFTA's and CAFTA's trade agreements."

He added that in addition to parallels between the potential impact of policy on laborers and farmers, there's another reason for his organization's interest in the upcoming, local forum. "Many of our own members are family farmers," he said. "We want to know more about how the WTO might impact farm policy. We don't want to see the same thing happen in agriculture as happened to us as steelworkers. We want to encourage as many family farmers as possible to be involved in this process."

The forum will be held in the meeting room at the Ste. Genevieve County Community Center. Doors will open at 8:30 a.m. The forum is expected to get underway at 9 a.m. Everyone is welcome.

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